

Interruption of the drouth brought on a revival of rattlesnakes in the shortgrass country. Been more snakes around the houses and barns than in years. The green grass must have provided more food needed in the reptile chain of life.

Man working down on the highway trapped two big snakes leaving their dens underneath a rock house. He blind set a number four trap beneath a hole in the foundation. ("Blind set" means no bait. (Can mean no quarry.) Chose this particular trap because of the light trigger, yet it's strong enough to hold snakes over four feet long. (To learn trapper lingo, hire one. All are big talkers. One session will be enough.)

Before going further, I want to state the facts before imagination takes over. Hard to straight-line snake stories. It's easy, for example, to add to the above in length and ferocity of the snakes, tempting to dramatize the snap of the jaws of a number four enclosing the writhing body, flouncing with such vigor the diamonds on the broad skin blur in the pitch of the battle for life of a venomous creature poison enough to fell man or beast.

The trapper, unlike most possum and polecat specialists posing as wolf trappers, stuck to the truth. He said, "The first snake laid still, caught in the trap's jaws; the second one died without so much as moving the trap out of place."

Omitted the old diversion of snake killers who claim, "I didn't measure the snake, but holding him shoulder high, the tail didn't clear the ground." He threw in another dodge, saying, "Wal, I wish now I'd of taken him down to the wool house and weighed him, but he was hard enough just to throw over the yard fence. (I may not be able to trap rattlesnakes, but give me credit for having the dialogue down.)

I needed him to come up to trap the snakes coming from under this house up on the Divide because I had company coming from the Northeast. Sure hoped a late cold spell kept the snakes under the house or a warm spell speeded the snakes leaving for the pasture, as the guests had seen on TV how many huge rattlers inhabit Texas.

Five days before the visit, my son John arrived. Had barely unpacked his bag before the lady cleaning the house found a rattlesnake indoors within three feet of the desk where this report is being written. I was taking a nap, so she and John pinned the snake down with the screw end of an old mop handle, causing enough racket in the overkill to demolish a boa constrictor.

Once awake, I told them in English and Spanish to settle down, that snakes don't come in the house to bite people. Snakes end up in the house from taking the wrong hole or the wrong floor crack. I concluded by asking for a cup of coffee in Spanish and a cease and desist order in English to stop pounding on the office floor with a mop handle during my nap.

By nightfall, John had plugged the holes and caulked the cracks in the walls and floors until the house was so airtight, we had to open the windows so we wouldn't suffocate.

We talked awhile after turning off the lights. Calmed him by telling of the time a cowboy claimed he surprised a big rattlesnake on a trail descending Seep Bluff at Monument. Rode so close to a rock ledge, the monster struck his right boot just above the bottom of his stirrup. Made the ride of his life with the huge snake's fang hanging in his boot sole and the snake's tail whipping the old pony from foreleg to his hind leg. (I rank this story "bunkhouse level veracity." Seep Bluff does have a trail leading by a snake den.)

Went to sleep listening to cement and caulking drying under the door sills and floor cracks. (House foundations shift on the 09 Divide. We need a Frank Lloyd Wright's advice to build foundations like he accomplished in earthquake zones.) John must have been going through jet lag. He was up several times, flashing a light under his bed and looking around behind the couch and in the closets in his room.

Told him next morning that greatest of great-grandmother hated snakes coming in her log cabin. Her daughter, Great Aunt Clara, wrote Uncle Goat Whiskers one night that her mother (Granny) noticed the big clock she brought from Mississippi missed striking the half-hour. Upon inspection, she found a rattlesnake wrapped around the

pendulum. Made her so mad she took tongs from the hearth and threw the snake in the fireplace.

The 16 pounds of prevention must have cured the problem. People came and left for days. The rattlesnakes held ground underneath the house. Was a nice visit, but I sure didn't get much chance to talk to the guests ...